

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 02335

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TAGS: PFOR, FR, VN, VS, CB, US

SUBJECT: TOUR D'HORIZON CONCERNING VIETNAM

REF: PARIS 32715

SUMMARY: IN PERIODIC CONVERSATION WITH VILLEMUR, HE SAID GOF THOUGHT SHIFT TO CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATION IN SAIGON WAS PRIMARILY A QUESTION OF FACADE, BUT THERE WAS ALSO A CHANGE IN THE PRG "NATIONAL FACADE". FRENCH BELIEVE THAT THE TIME IS PAST FOR REQUESTING GOF TO PROTECT US INTERESTS IN SVN ONLY. GOF BELIEVES FOREIGNERS (AND SELECTED VIETNAMESE) WILL BE ABLE TO CONTINUE TO LEAVE SVN, BUT THAT THERE IS LOW LEVEL OBSTRUCTIONISM. FRENCH AID PROGRAM FOR NORTH VIETNAM IS BEING IMPLEMENTED, BUT VIETNAMESE HAVE NOT RESPONDED TO GOF POSITION THAT ANY AID PROGRAM FOR SVN WOULD BUILD ON THE 1973 AND 1974 AID PROTOCOLS WITH THE GVN. AID IS NOT DIRECTLY TIED TO VIETNAMESE ACTIONS CONCERNING FRENCH INVESTMENTS IN SVN, BUT THE OVER-ALL
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ENVIRONMENT WILL INFLUENCE FRENCH AID. NO CONCRETE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE IN COMMERCIAL AIR LINE LINKS

WITH SAIGON; FRENCH BELIEVE THEY WILL HAVE TO EXTEND THEIR SPECIAL FLIGHTS.

1. ESTABLISHMENT OF CIVILIAN ADMINISTRATION IN SAIGON.

QUAI VIETNAM DESK OFFICER VILLEMUR TOLD EMBOFF 22 JANUARY THAT GOF CONSIDERED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A CIVILIAN COMMITTEE TO GOVERN SAIGON TO BE JUST A CHANGE IN FACADE IN THE MOVE TOWARD UNIFICATION. THE FRENCH CONSUL GENERAL IN SAIGON MASSENET HAD NOTED THAT THIS CITY-LEVEL CHANGE HAD HAD "NATIONAL" REPERCUSSIONS. FOR ABOUT 15 DAYS THERE HAD BEEN AN INCREASE IN REFERENCES TO THE PRG AND THE POLITICAL OFFICE OF THE MILITARY COMMITTEE HAD HAD ITS NAME PLAQUE CHANGED FROM POLITICAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY COMMITTEE TO PRG MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. A DIRECTOR OF POLITICAL AFFAIRS IN THE MINISTRY HAD BEEN DESIGNATED, NGUYEN VAN CHAU. MASSENET, WHO WAS GIVEN THE TITLE OF "REPRESENTATIVE OF FRANCE" AND NOT CONSUL GENERAL, HAD ALREADY BEEN IN CONTACT WITH CHAU.

2. FRENCH PROTECTION OF US INTERESTS. VILLEMUR SAID THAT MASSENET'S IRREGULAR STATUS IN SAIGON WOULD NOT PERMIT HIM TO MAKE A POLITICAL DEMARCHE SUCH AS AN INQUIRY WITH PRG CONCERNING PROTECTION OF US INTERESTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM. THE GOF HAD INFORMED THE DRV THAT IT SAW NO UTILITY IN HAVING ITS AMBASSADOR AT HANOI PRESENT CREDENTIALS IN SAIGON FOR A SHORT INTERIM PERIOD. THE DRV HAD NOTED THAT SOME COUNTRIES WISHED THEIR AMBASSADOR TO PRESENT CREDENTIALS TO THE PRG, AND THEY HAD INTERPOSED NO OBJECTION. DRV DID NOT, HOWEVER, ENCOURAGE ANYONE WHO WAS RELUCTANT TO MAKE THIS GESTURE. THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR IN HANOI WOULD THEREFORE CONTINUE TO BE THE PRINCIPAL CHANNEL FOR FORMAL POLITICAL ACTIONS, EVEN THOSE CONCERNING THE SOUTH, BUT WOULD NOT BE ACCREDITED TO THE PRG. THE AMBASSADOR IN HANOI WOULD, UPON THE UNIFICATION OF THE COUNTRY, BE ABLE TO PROPOSE FRENCH PROTECTION OF US INTERESTS WITHIN WHATEVER FRAMEWORK THE US DESIRED SUCH AS LIMITATION TO THE SOUTH. HOWEVER, SUCH AN
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APPROACH WOULD BE TO THE GOVERNMENT OF A UNITED VIETNAM AND THIS GOVERNMENT COULD CONSIDER THAT THE ROLE WOULD COVER THE NORTH AS WELL AS SOUTH. IN EFFECT, THE TIME WAS PAST FOR FRANCE OR SOME OTHER COUNTRY TO PROTECT US INTERESTS IN SVN ONLY. IN THE MEANTIME, VILLEMUR SAID MASSENET WOULD BE OF WHAT ASSISTANCE HE COULD TO AMERICAN CITIZENS WITHIN THE LIMITS OF HIS UNCONVENTIONAL ROLE.

3. DEPARTURES FROM SAIGON. VILLEMUR SAID THAT AL-

THOUGH AMERICANS HAD NOT BEEN ON SOME OF THE RECENT
FLIGHTS FROM SAIGON, THE FRENCH HAD NO FEELING THAT
THERE WAS ANY ATTEMPT TO HOLD THEM OR OTHER FOREIGNERS
IN
SAIGON. THE FRENCH HAD THE IMPRESSION THAT THE
DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN IN HANOI TO LET ALL FOREIGNERS
LEAVE -- AND EVEN TO ENCOURAGE SOME TO DO SO -- AND

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ALSO TO LOOK FAVORABLY IN GENERAL ON THE DEPARTURE OF
SOME VIETNAMESE, PARTICULARLY THOSE RELATED TO
FOREIGNERS. VILLEMUR SAID THAT DESPITE THIS POLICY
DECISION, THERE APPEAR TO BE SOME PROBLEMS IN EXECUTION;
THEIR MISSION IN SAIGON HAD INDICATED THAT SOME OFFI-
CIALS AT THE LOWER LEVELS WERE DELAYING IMPLEMENTATION
BECAUSE OF OPPOSITION TO THE PROGRAM OR RESENTMENT BE-
CAUSE THE DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN IN HANOI. THE FRENCH
BELIEVED THAT THE EVACUATION WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED AS

DECIDED IN HANOI, BUT THAT IT MAY TAKE LONGER BECAUSE OF SUCH OPPOSITION IN SAIGON. THERE WAS A CONTINUING PROBLEM OF FORGED PAPERS AND THE AUTHORITIES IN SAIGON HAD AGREED TO TAKE BACK THOSE WHO GOT AS FAR AS BANGKOK USING SUCH DOCUMENTS.

4. FRENCH COMMERCIAL/AID RELATIONS WITH VIETNAM.
VILLEMUR GAVE FURTHER DETAILS CONCERNING THE CURRENT STATUS OF FRENCH COMMERCIAL AND AID RELATIONS WITH THE
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TWO VIETNAMS (REFTEL). THE FRENCH ARE COMPLETING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 1974 PROTOCOL OF AID (GRANT AND LOANS) FOR NORTH VIETNAM. THE 1975 PROTOCOL SIGNED DURING THE COURCEL MISSION PROVIDED FOR 229 MILLION FRANCS AID (GRANT AND LOAN) COMPARED TO THE 130 MILLION IN THE 1974 PROTOCOL. THEY HAVE NOT YET STARTED TO IMPLEMENT THE 1975 PROTOCOL, AND THE DRV HAS NOT YET DECIDED ON ANY PROJECTS. THE FRENCH MINISTRY OF FINANCE IS RELUCTANT TO IMPLEMENT ANY PART OF THE 1975 PROTOCOL UNTIL THE FUNDS PROVIDED IN THE 1974 PROTOCOL ARE USED. THE GOF EXPECTS THE DRV TO MOVE MORE RAPIDLY NOW AND BELIEVES THAT FOLLOWING THE UNIFICATION OF VIETNAM IT WILL BE POSSIBLE TO NEGOTIATE A 1976 PROTOCOL CONCERNING AID TO THE NEW UNITED VIETNAM. AS FOR SOUTH VIETNAM, THE DRV WAS STILL CHEWING OVER THE FRENCH POSITION THAT THE PRG WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE LOANS ALREADY CONTRACTED BY THE GVN UNDER THE 1974 AND 1974 PROTOCOLS IF IT WISHED TO RECEIVE THE UNUSED GRANT PART OF THE 1974 PROTOCOL. ANY FRENCH PROTOCOL FOR 1975 WOULD ALSO BE POSITED ON PRG ACCEPTANCE OF THE TWO PREVIOUS PROTOCOLS SIGNED WITH THE GVN. SINCE THE DRV SEEMED ANXIOUS TO HAVE THE PRG INHERIT THE ASSETS BUT NOT THE LIABILITIES OF THE GVN, THE GOF BASICALLY THOUGHT THAT VIETNAMESE WOULD DROP ANY FURTHER DISCUSSION OF AID MATTERS CONCERNING SOUTH VIETNAM UNTIL IT WOULD BE INCLUDED IN A 1976 PROTOCOL FOR UNITED VIETNAM. THE FRENCH DID NOT, ON THE OTHER HAND, INDICATE ANY FORMAL LINK BETWEEN VIETNAMESE ACTIONS CONCERNING FRENCH PROPERTY IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND THE FRENCH AID PROGRAM. HOWEVER, THE GOF MADE IT CLEAR THAT A PRINCIPAL POINT IN THEIR AID PROGRAM WAS PROCEEDING BY "GRADUAL AND SYMMETRIC" STEPS. EVERYTHING IN THEIR RELATIONS DEPENDED UPON EVERYTHING ELSE IN A MOVE FROM ONE STAGE TO THE NEXT. HENCE, DESPITE A FORMAL LINK, THE VIETNAMESE POSITION ON FRENCH ASSETS IN SOUTH VIETNAM WILL BE PART OF THE CONTEXT FOR FUTURE AID DISCUSSIONS.

5. AIR FRANCE SERVICES FOR VIETNAM. DURING THE COURCEL MISSION, THE GOF HAD HOPED THAT AIR FRANCE COULD

NEGOTIATE A PERIODIC STOPOVER IN SAIGON IN ORDER TO
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RELIEVE THE GOF OF THE NECESSITY OF RUNNING SPECIAL
FLIGHTS FOR THOSE OF ITS 5,500 FRENCH CITIZENS STILL IN
SAIGON WHO WISHED TO LEAVE (REFTEL, PARA. 4). VILLEMUR
UNDERSTOOD THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS HAD NOT ADVANCED, AND
IT WAS LIKELY THAT THE GOF WOULD HAVE TO CONTINUE ITS
SPECIAL FLIGHTS BEYOND THE FEBRUARY DATE -- THE GOF
ANTICIPATED NO PROBLEMS WITH THE VIETNAMESE ON THIS
SCORE. AIR FRANCE WAS STILL DEBATING THE PROFITABILITY
AND OTHER FACTORS IN NEGOTIATING A STOPOVER IN VIETNAM.
ONE PROBLEM WAS THAT GIA LAM AIRPORT DID NOT HAVE GOOD
FACILITIES FOR THE LARGE JETS AIR FRANCE OR UTA WOULD BE
USING ON ITS ASIAN RUNS. THE FRENCH HAD HEARD OF A
LARGER AIRPORT IN THE HANOI AREA WHICH MIGHT POSSIBLY BE
AN ADEQUATE SUBSTITUTE. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT LOOKED
AS THOUGH SAIGON WOULD IN MANY WAYS BECOME THE COM-
MERCIAL CAPITAL OF VIETNAM AND WOULD THEREFORE PROVIDE
MORE BUSINESS TRAFFIC IN ADDITION TO A FAIRLY STEADY
STREAM, AT LEAST IN THE BEGINNING, OF PASSENGERS
LEAVING VIETNAM. AIR FRANCE AND UTA WOULD CONTINUE
THEIR EFFORTS TO WORK OUT A STOPOVER IN EITHER HANOI OR
SAIGON TO DETERMINE WHETHER IT WOULD INDEED BE PROFIT-
ABLE. OF EVEN GREATER CONCERN TO AIR FRANCE IS WORKING
OUT OVERFLIGHT PERMISSION, WHICH WILL BECOME VERY
IMPORTANT IF AIR FRANCE CAN OBTAIN PERMISSION TO OVERFLY
CAMBODIA.

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6. MCGOVERN'S VISIT TO HANOI AND SAIGON. THE FRENCH WERE VERY INTERESTED IN MCGOVERNS BEING ABLE TO GET TO SAIGON, THE SECOND HIGH WESTERN PERSONALITY TO BE ABLE TO DO SO. ALTHOUGH MANY HAD TALKED WITH PHAM VAN DONG, FEW HAD SEEN PHAT OR MADAME BINH. THE GOF THOUGHT IT ALSO SIGNIFICANT THAT DESPITE HIS STATEMENTS, QUOTED BY VNA, THAT THE US HAD AN OBLIGATION TO PROVIDE AID TO VIETNAM, MCGOVERN HAD TOLD PRG IN SAIGON THAT AID, IF GIVEN BY THE UNITED STATES, WOULD NOT BE BASED ON THE PARIS AGREEMENT. FRENCH WOULD APPRECIATE ANY FURTHER INFORMATION ON MCGOVERN'S TRIP.

7. FRENCH POUCH FACILITIES TO SAIGON. IN THE AGREEMENT WORKED OUT ON SPECIAL FLIGHTS, THE FRENCH MISSION IN SAIGON WAS PERMITTED ONE POUCH A WEEK, WHICH, EVERY OTHER WEEK, WOULD BE ACCOMPANIED. THESE POUCHES ARE STILL LIMITED IN WEIGHT AND DO NOT CONTAIN PUBLICATIONS. CONFIDENTIAL

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8. NEW DEPUTY ASIAN DIRECTOR FOR INDOCHINA AFFAIRS. EMBOFF TOOK ADVANTAGE OF PRE-ARRANGED APPOINTMENT WITH VILLEMUR TO CALL ON THE NEW DEPUTY DIRECTOR REPLACING HENRY BOLLE. FRANCOISE DOPFFER, BORN 1941, HAS THE RANK OF COUNSELLOR SECOND CLASS. HE GRADUATED FROM THE PRESTIGIOUS NATIONAL SCHOOL OF ADMINISTRATION IN 1967 AND HAS SERVED IN PARIS, BUCHAREST AND TOKYO. ALTHOUGH HIS RAPID ADVANCEMENT INDICATES HE IS RESPECTED IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, HIS YOUTH AND LACK OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN EXPERIENCE SHOWS THAT THE GOF NO LONGER CONSIDERS IT NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN IN THIS POSITION SOMEONE OF THE AGE AND EXPERIENCE OF HIS PREDECESSOR. RUSH

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